

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 001524

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/PPD, NEA/P, IIP/G/NEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: DEMOCRACY AND IRRESPONSIBILITY

REF: MUSCAT 1499

1. Summary: The Omani Internet message board "al-Sablah" is the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language forum for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, this popular site nevertheless offers a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

- Omani Democracy
- Irresponsibility In The Private Sector
- Appeal For Freedom Of Expression
- Approval For Private Television And Radio Stations

End summary.

-----  
Wanted: Prime Minister  
-----

2. Representative government took center stage in al-Sablah when a member posed the question, "How far has democracy reached in the Sultanate of Oman? The Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) has limited powers, the Majlis al-Dawla (State Council) is merely a form of early retirement, and there are no political parties." Most respondents agreed with the tone of the topic's author. "The government prohibits opposition groups and political gatherings, and has even put a ban on the press," noted one observer. Another contributed, "There is a fear that if the ministers allow civil society to develop, the people will soon call for the ministers to be changed." One gloomy participant wrote, "By the way, huge budgets are being allocated to the Majlis Oman - so at the end of the day, not only do the people lose democracy, but they lose their money as well."

3. This popular topic (3,628 hits, 1,075 responses) provoked others to ask, "Why don't we have a genuine Prime Minister in Oman?" The vast majority of respondents agreed that establishing a true PM would be a boon for the Omani government. However, others lamented that "We have been calling for such an official for years. do you see anybody in that position yet?"

-----  
The Irresponsibility Of Youth  
-----

4. A new topic that generated 1,335 hits and 44 responses dwelt on the perceived irresponsibility of young Omanis working in the private sector. "Unfortunately, many of these young workers are not disciplined and always looking to get out of their duties," complained the author. Many readers agreed: "The productivity of these young Omanis is far less than the expatriate employees, and they do not work faithfully or honestly. They are always coming up with new justifications for taking leave."

5. Some blamed the phenomenon on the government's "Omanization" policy of setting quotas for Omani employees in the private sector. "Private sector institutions accept uneducated and unqualified people because they are obliged to satisfy the Omanization quotas from the Ministry of Manpower," declared one writer. Others sought out additional targets: "The Ministry of Higher Education bears full responsibility for this predicament when it blocks the path of education for these youths, and will not help them continue their studies."

-----  
Mass Appeal  
-----

6. One of the al-Sablah message board supervisors penned a letter of appeal to a number of royal family members, urging them to increase the freedom of expression for Omani citizens. "Your Excellencies, the most important type of freedom is the freedom of speech," began the letter. "The recent incidents of arrests and mistreatment - including that of Taybah al-Ma'wali - are evidence of the shameful state of freedom in the Sultanate, which will result in a retarded generation incapable of constructive criticism." Attracting 1,700 hits and 45 responses, the letter received broad support from al-Sablah members.

-----  
Channeling The Discontent  
-----

-----  
17. The news that the Ministry of Information approved applications on October 10 for a private television station and two private radio stations was greeted with a mixture of hope and suspicion among al-Sablah members. "Maybe these new channels will mask the defects of our current stations, and we hope that serious intellectuals and innovators will play a greater role in these channels," wrote one contributor. Others (out of 233 hits and 14 responses) expressed skepticism that the channels would offer anything new. One individual wrote, "I hope one of the radio stations broadcasts the Qu'ran and Islamic lectures. We have gotten bored of the Sultanate's only radio station, which only plays music all day long."

BALTIMORE